



**OPINION 6**

**BJP RETAINS CONTROL, INDIA GAINS GROUND**

**WORLD 8**

**BIDEN ADMIN SENDING \$1 BILLION MORE IN WEAPONS, AMMO TO ISRAEL**

**MONEY 10**

**MARKETS SNAP THREE DAYS WINNING RUN**

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 20 Issue 132  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

BHUBANESWAR, THURSDAY MAY 16, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

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## Mamata promises to back INDIA in power

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■  
KOLKATA

Often proudly claiming to be the true architect of the Indian National Democratic Inclusive Alliance (INDIA), Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee had previously decided to contest elections in Bengal without the Congress and the Left. However, on Wednesday, she announced that she would support INDIA Bloc from the outside if it came to power. Addressing an election rally at Chinsurah in Hooghly district, Mamata said, "After the Modi Government goes we will provide the leadership to the INDIA Bloc and support it from outside and ensure that the people of Bengal — including those who have not been paid the wages for hundred days' work — get back their rights." Mamata's claim came a day after she told another rally that the first four phases of polling have clearly indicated that the weather for the BJP is changing and that INDIA Bloc would win 315 seats against 195 that would fall in the saffron party's bag. "Modi is going and there will be no Modi in Delhi... and Didi will ensure that the INDIA Bloc comes to power at the Centre," she said.

Notwithstanding her "outside support" pledge for INDIA Bloc, Mamata said by INDIA she did not mean the Left and the Congress of Bengal. "I don't mean the



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee greets supporters during an election roadshow for the Lok Sabha polls, in Howrah, on Wednesday PTI

leadership of the INDIA parties. However, they are not fools. She has managed to save herself by striking a deal with Modi, but after there is no BJP in Delhi, she will have to answer for her misdeeds," said CPI(M)'s Bikash Ranjan Bhattacharya. Back to the rallies both Mamata and Union Home Minister Amit Shah traded relentless fire. Shah referred to the Sandeshkhali incident saying the Chief Minister had developed her own modus operandi where 'she lets her men first commit crimes... and to hide it she gets more crimes committed... Sandeshkhali is a classic example of this.' On the other hand, Mamata attacked the Prime Minister calling him a publicity man. "Here is a Prachar Babu who wants to get photographed everywhere... asking him to appear in new dresses and get photographed and he has no problem because he wants publicity only... publicity and lies are his two weapons," Mamata said questioning the Prime Minister's earlier claims that he was giving cooking gas, ration and other facilities to the people for free. "He promised ₹15 lakh in every account... did you get it... he promised 2 crore jobs per year... did you get that job... he is telling you that he is giving gas and ration for free... but that is also not true... he is only a prachar babu who thrives on publicity," she said.

Left and the Congress of Bengal, who are the agents of the BJP and are fighting the elections separately. I am talking about the Congress that is in Delhi,"



she said, leading to a lot of criticism from both the Left and the State Congress ranks. "Didi is also afraid because she is thinking

that if the INDIA Bloc comes to power, then she might have to turn to them to save her leaders, her nephew, and herself. So, she is trying to separate the national leadership and the State

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### USCIS plans extra time for laid off Indian H-1B workers

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

In a possible relief to scores of Indians, laid-off H-1B workers can stay beyond 60 days in the US. This directive by the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) comes amid a slew of layoffs by tech companies in the US, which have impacted thousands of employees, including Indians. The USCIS clarified that laid-off H-1B visa holders could

stay in the US beyond the 60-day period. To remain in the US beyond the grace period, the laid-off H-1B workers can apply for a new employer, change visa status, or adjust their visa status. H-1B non-immigrants can work for a new employer after filing a new H-1B petition. Tech companies like Google, Meta, Apple, Dell, Twitter, Amazon, and Microsoft, among many others, have terminated scores of non-immigrant

employees living in the US, including many Indians. There is a general assumption that laid-off staffers have to leave the US within 60 days. However, the USCIS has clarified this in its latest statement. "When non-immigrant workers are laid off, they may not be aware of their options and, in some cases, may wrongly assume that they have no option but to leave the country within 60 days," stated the USCIS in its latest release.



Photo: The Pioneer

### Ram temple, Modi aura will see me through: Bidhuri

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Ramvir Singh Bidhuri, a veteran in the politics of the national Capital, is vying for the South Delhi Lok Sabha 2024 seat as a BJP candidate. He claimed that the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya will have a significant impact on the voters of his constituency, who will vote for him to give Prime Minister Narendra Modi a third term in a row. The sitting MLA from Badarpur and Leader of the Opposition said Congress leader Rahul Gandhi is not an alternative to Modi. Having an experience in the political domain for 53 long years, Bidhuri told The Pioneer in the midst of his campaign that people have made up their minds. "They are going to vote for Modi above caste, religion and community. In front of people, there is no alternative to Modi. Rahul tries to be his alternative but people are not taking him seriously. I believe that last time, the BJP candidates had 57 per cent to 60 per cent votes. This time, BJP is going to get more than 70 per cent votes. BJP is winning all seven seats in Delhi because people have a lot of faith in Modi," he said. Born and brought up in a family of farmers in South Delhi's Tughlakabad village, he said he will get votes in the elections to make Modi secure a third term again, who he claims will get the same respect from the countrymen as Lord Ram and Krishna got.

### Uttarakhand Chief Secy feels SC heat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Slamming the Uttarakhand Government for its "lackadaisical" approach in controlling forest fires, the Supreme Court on Wednesday directed the State's Chief Secretary to personally present himself before it on May 17 to give explanation, including on utilisation of funds and vacancies in forest department. Terming it a "very sorry state of affairs", the apex court said the State was just trying to find some excuse or the other. A bench headed by Justice B R Gavai directed that the staff and vehicles of the forest departments of States shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like the 'Char Dham Yatra'. "We are at pains to say the approach of the State of Uttarakhand in controlling the fires is, to say the least, lackadaisical. Though action plans have been prepared and finalised, no steps are being taken for implementation of the same," said the bench, also comprising Justices SVN Bhatti and Sandeep



Mehta. The top court was hearing a plea on raging forest fires in Uttarakhand. The bench said when funds from the Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA) were available and also sanctioned by the Central authority, it saw no reason as to why only ₹3.41 crore out of the ₹9.12 crore was utilised for forest related activity in Uttarakhand in 2023-24. The bench observed it also saw no reason as to why the balance amount was not utilised for forestry. "Another issue that needs to be addressed is with regard to huge vacancies in the forest department



of the State of Uttarakhand," it said. The bench noted that one of the grievances raised by the state was regarding failure of timely disbursement of the national disaster management fund or state disaster management fund. "We fail to understand as to how the State could have grievance with regard to the disbursement of state disaster management funds in as much as it is within the domain of the state to disburse the said funds," it said. "It is further pertinent to note that at one hand, the state contends that the resources, that is, manpower and vehicles are not available, and on the other hand, keeps a large number of

vacancies..." the bench observed. It said taking into consideration the importance of controlling forest fires in Uttarakhand, the apex court had requested Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Aishwarya Bhati to take instructions with regard to disbursement of funds for financial year 2023-2024. The bench said in so far as CAMPA funds are concerned, it has been submitted that these funds are lying with the state and it was for the state to release them for works undertaken by the forest department. It noted that as far as exemption of field officials of the forest department from election duty, Char Dham yatra and other related activities was concerned, the Election Commission by various orders has already exempted its staff and vehicles from elections and allied purposes. "Be that as it may, we direct that in all the states, the forest staff as well as the forest vehicles shall not be requisitioned for election purposes or any other purposes like 'Char Dham Yatra'," the bench said.

### Police warn about cyber frauds during polls

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Commissionerate police have warned people to be careful of cybercriminals duping people during the election period by sending fraudulent messages. According to police, the miscreants are calling up people by claiming they won't be able to vote since their voter cards have not been updated. Then, they ask for their Voter Identity Card details against some money. Once the person gives the details, a link is sent to the person's phone; and if the person clicks on the link, money from his or her bank account gets cleaned off

within no time. "People are also getting messages informing them that a political party wants to recharge their phone and asking them to click on the link sent to their phone to avail the benefits. But you should verify such calls and messages before giving the details. You can go to the National Voters Service Portal and check for yourself," city DCP Prateek Singh said. Warning people not to believe in fake calls, Singh urged people to lodge a complaint on sanchaarsathi.gov.in or call on 1930 if they get such fake calls.

### Nomadic bird haven turns a swamp

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Kabartal Lake, Asia's largest freshwater lake nestled in Bihar's Begusarai district and designated as a Ramsar Wetland site in 2020, is gasping for breath due to the State Government's inaction. The unchecked expansion of human settlements, agricultural activities, and infrastructure development around this lake, once a paradise for large numbers of winged birds, has encroached upon its natural habitat. The development has a debilitating impact on the oxbow shape lake leading to reduction in its size from its original 7,000-hectare expanse to just over 2,620 hectares. Standing ruined, the lake has now been deserted even by

migratory birds, which are now seeking other sites for breeding and resting purposes. It used to be home to several aquatic flora and fauna. To add to the woes of this water body which was once sprawled over 7,000 hectares, is the construction of embankment on the near-by Burhi Gandak river that has choked the major water inlet to the wetland. Poaching of migratory birds, once abundant in the area, further exacerbates the ecological imbalance and undermines conservation efforts. It was first declared a protected area by the State government in 1986, and later, a sanctuary by the Central Government, to prevent poaching of birds. Oxbow lake like shape is typically crescent-shaped and



common features in floodplains and low-lying areas near rivers, like in the cases of this water body also famously known as Kanwar Lake. It is formed by meandering Gandak River. The site lies in

Indo-Gangetic plains of North Bihar which is one of the most productive flood-plains of the world and accommodates a large population. Intriguingly while the Centre identified it as Bihar's first

Ramsar Site in a bid to put it on the global map, tourists coming here express disappointment when they see the condition of the lake, which bears no resemblance to the descriptions they have read or heard about, according to reports. Such has been the apathy of the authorities that despite being declared a protected area by the Bihar Government in 1986 and a bird sanctuary in 1986 and in 1989, overall, there has been a large-scale reduction in wetlands in Bihar as low as 2620 hectares. Even though locals depend on farming, encroachment has been growing. Due to the encroachment of the wetland for agricultural practices, the Kabartal wetland's declining ecosystem is visible, as is the ongoing loss in the wetland area. Despite the proclamation of a

bird sanctuary, numerous birds have been designated as fragile or endangered negatively impact species, according to a study 'Kabartal (Kanwar) Lake: First Ramsar Wetland Site of Bihar' published in ResearchGate. It was presented at the 9th International Multidisciplinary Conference on Current Research Trends-2023, last year. The authors of the article are Bijay Kumar Das, Associate Professor, Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, Khushbu Kumari, Independent researcher from Patna, Avi Kush, a Civil Engineering student from SMVDU, Katra, Jammu and Kashmir, Arpita Srivastav from Department of Architecture and Planning, NIT Patna, and Sumit Kumar, a wildlife photographer.



# 'Modi provides rice to poor; Naveen distributes empty bags'

Shameful that Odisha govt is run by babus: Amit Shah

**PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR**  
Prime Minister Narendra Modi is sending free rice to the poor across the country including Odisha, but CM Naveen Patnaik is misleading people by giving rice in a bag with his own image, alleged Union Home Minister Amit Shah while addressing a public meeting at Sorada in Ganjam district on Wednesday. Shah said Modi ensured everything to restore Odia pride. Be it the display of the Konark Sun temple wheel as the backdrop of the G20 meeting, the appointment of Droupadi Murmu as the President of India, and the release of a commemorative stamp and coin on the Paika rebellion, Modi

has worked hard for the people of Odisha. "When the entire country was celebrating Ram Lalla's homecoming, the Naveen Patnaik government tried its best to prevent the people of the State from attending the celebrations through various means. Today, I want to tell Naveenbabu that the people of Odisha never forgive the person who stops the Ram Utsav," said Shah. "Bags will be of no use; rather, CM Naveen Patnaik should add 2.5 kg more rice so that it fills empty stomachs here and you get blessings," said Shah and hastened to add, "There is no longer the need for Naveenbabu as BJP will form government here and there will be an Odia CM." Be it puca houses, cooking gas, drinking water or the Ayushman Bharat scheme, the people of Odisha are deprived of various schemes including



the Rs 5 lakh health assistance. Naveen Patnaik thinks that his popularity would drop if Ayushman Bharat is implemented in Odisha, alleged Shah. He said the income of farmers in Odisha is low compared to other States as the paddy is sold at nominal rates. In Chhattisgarh, paddy is being procured at Rs 3,100 per quintal. "Devotees are facing problems as the four gates of Puri Jagannath Temple are not being

opened. I promise you that the day a BJP CM takes oath, all the gates of Puri Srimandir will be opened. Lord Jagannath's idol is being insulted. I want to ask Naveenbabu where are the original keys of Ratna Bhandar? Who made the duplicate keys and whether they were used to open Ratna Bhandar? What happened to the investigation report? Whom the Naveenbabu's government wants to save?" questioned Shah. "I want to assure that the BJP will make the inquiry report public within six days after forming government in Odisha," he said. "People of Odisha chose Naveen Patnaik, but is he running the government here? It is shameful that the government is being run by babus. If Naveen wanted to hand over responsibility to babus, he should have given to an Odia, but why an outsider," questioned Shah. From Aska, thousands of youths migrate to other parts of the country in search of livelihood. PM Modi has brought the One Nation, One Ration card. But Naveen Patnaik is not implementing it and the rice is being embezzled by officers, he alleged. "For years, people voted for Naveen Patnaik. Give BJP five years, not a single youth from the State will have to move out in search of livelihood. The

sugar mills have stopped due to a lack of irrigation. BJP will make irrigation facilities and set up ethanol plants and sugar mills to strengthen the sugarcane growers here. Ganjam is the home district of Naveen Patnaik, but I want to ask him whether a single factory has come up here? Has drinking water reached people along with irrigation facilities and cold storages? We promise to make Ganjam district the number one district in the country if voted to power," Shah said. He said Naveen is not doing anything for the chit fund-duped investors. Once the BJP comes to power, those who have looted the money would be taken to task within 18 months. Shah said a cash voucher of Rs 50,000 would be provided to women under Subhadra Yojana and they can use it to buy furniture, fans and anything for the education of children.

## In Keonjhar Man kills wife, hides body in sack, arrested

**PNS ■ KEONJHAR**  
The Keonjhar police arrested and forwarded a man to court on Wednesday for killing his wife and hiding the body in a sack in a locked room in Sadangi village under Baria police station limits. After seizing the body, the police sent it to Champua sub divisional hospital for post mortem. The accused was identified as Pradip Bentkar of Sadangi village, while the deceased was identified as Barsali Bentkar. Sources said that Pradip had a quarrel with his wife on some matter on Monday night. According to the information, on Monday evening Pradip dragged his drunken wife from the village to his house. He allegedly thrashed her in the house closing the door, where she died. Later, to hide the incident, he put the body in a sack and locked the room. The incident came to light after Pradip's daughter Sandhya Bentkar searched for her mother. After opening the room of the house, he found the body inside the sack and reported it to the police. While fleeing, villagers caught Pradip and tied him up to a pole in the village and informed the police. IIC Baria police station Hemant Kumar Majhi said, "The accused was rescued and arrested and the investigation of the incident is continuing. The exact cause of murder is yet not clear. The truth will come out after the autopsy and investigation reports are obtained."

## In Ganjam MLA candidate's supporters misbehave with woman

**Complaint lodged**  
**PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR**  
BJD workers allegedly misbehaved with a woman who asked some questions to Latika Pradhan, the MLA nominee of the ruling party for the Kabisuryanagar constituency in Ganjam district on Tuesday night. The incident happened while Pradhan along with her supporters was campaigning in Beguniapada panchayat in Kabisuryanagar. As per reports, a group of women stopped Pradhan's vehicle and surrounded her and asked questions about basic facilities like drinking water. However, getting irritated with the questioning, the BJD leader's supporters allegedly



abused a woman identified as Chhaya Behera. She was pushed; and when she fell down, some BJD workers kicked her, Chhaya alleged. Some locals rescued the woman and admitted her to the Khallikote Hospital. But the doctors there referred her to the MKCG Medical College Hospital in Brahmapur. Later, she filed a complaint with police in connection with the incident alleging that some drunken men abused and assaulted her. However, the MLA nominee is yet to comment on the incident.

## BJD has edge over BJP in S'garh Parl seat

**5-time MP Jual may find it tough to maintain winning streak**  
**AUROBINDA DAS ■ ROURKELA**  
In the Sundargarh Parliamentary seat, a direct contest between the BJD and the BJP is being seen though the Congress has fielded its candidate. In 2019 elections despite the Naveen Patnaik wave, the BJP could win the Sundargarh Parliament and three Assembly seats of Sundargarh district and the latter succeeded to win by a thin margin of 18,829. But this time Dilip is quite popular in the district for his significant role in hosting the World Cup Hockey in Rourkela and construction of an international standard Hockey Stadium in Rourkela along with 17 hockey turf ground in 17 blocks of the district. As Sundargarh is the cradle of hockey, Tirkey has become an icon for the tribal youth here. Significantly, hundreds of reputed sports personalities are also campaigning for Tirkey throughout the district. On the other hand, Jual has represented 5 times for Sundargarh as an MP and remained two times as Cabinet Minister under two different Prime Ministers such as Atal Behari Vajpayee and Narendra Modi. But he has not done any significant works either for the tribal people in particular or for the district in general. Rather he is involved in many controversies for his behaviour and manner. Even a woman leader of his own party has lodged an FIR against the filthy words of Jual. So, this time Jual may not find his going smooth. Conversely, Dilip may get its benefits, feel political pundits here

## In Baleswar Rs 1-cr gold, Rs 4L cash seized from 2 vehicles

**PNS ■ BALESWAR**  
GST and police officials on Tuesday night during frisking of vehicles seized gold weighing 1.57 kg stashed in 11 packets and cash worth Rs 4 lakhs from two vehicles at the Ambliatha and Laxmannath toll plazas near Jaleswar in Baleswar district. The estimated value of the seized gold is around Rs 1 crore. According to sources, a joint team of GST and police intercepted a vehicle on its way to Baripada from Kolkata near the West Bengal border during checking in view of the elections in the State. The occupants of the vehicle were detained at the Jaleswar police station for questioning after they failed to produce the necessary documents claiming ownership over the seized gold. The cops seized Rs 4 lakh from the other vehicle, the sources said.

## 2 injured deer rescued; 1 carcass seized in K'jhar

**One of injured deer died despite treatment**  
**PNS ■ KEONJHAR**  
The Forest officials rescued two injured deer and seized the carcass of a deer in the last two days in Keonjhar district. Of the two rescued injured deer, one died during treatment, the other was released into the wild. Sources said the Patna Forest range officials rescued an injured spotted deer on Wednesday from Mallarpada village which was later released into the nearby forest after being treated while on Tuesday, the officials rescued another spotted deer which was injured due to attack by a stray dog from Belasarei village under Saharpada section. The deer was immediately provided treatment but it could not survive. Foerster Bhupathi Sethi said the dead deer was buried in the premises of the forest office. Earlier, several wild deer wandering incidents took place in Saharpada Section of office of Patna range. Some of them died and the rest were released after being rescued by the Forest department. Similarly, the Forest department on Tuesday seized the carcass of a spotted male deer with injury in leg and body whose horns allegedly were missing in Kutaripasi village under Barbil forest range area. The body was later buried after a postmortem at Joda veterinary hospital, sources said. The department was yet to seize the horns and ascertain the cause of death of the wild deer. Assistant Conservator of Forest, Keonjhar, Ashok Das said, "We are investigating the cause of death and taking care for their protection". Due to summer heat, many wild deer from different forests in Patna, Barbil and Telkoi forest range areas come out of the forest either in search of water or to escape from forest fire entering into the villages nearby. They often fall prey to stray dogs and hunters.



## 'BJP to focus dev of M'bhanj if elected to power'

**PNS ■ BARIAPADA**  
All-round development of the long-neglected district of Mayurbhanj will be the top priority of BJP, if its candidates get elected, said BJP's Mayurbhanj MP candidate Naba Charan Majhi. At a Press conference, he, elaborating his plans and visions, talked of the need of doing a lot for betterment and development in the fields of roads, railways, tourism, education and health in the backward area. Asserting that Modiji's coming to power at the Centre in the 2024 elections is a certainty, Majhi said that during first 100 days of the upcoming 3rd consecutive term of NDA visible steps will be taken towards construction of three long-awaited new railway lines namely Bangripogorumahisani, Budhamara-Chakulia and Keonjhar-Badampahar. The Press meet was also addressed by the party's MLA candidates Prakasha Chandra Soren, Dr Krushna Chandra Mohapatra and Bhadrachandra Hansda, besides party's district president Kandra Soren and state executive member Sanjeev Mohanty.

## In Bargarh Min Rita Sahu questioned about dev in her area

**PNS ■ BARGARH**  
Minister and Bijepur Assembly BJD candidate Rita Sahu faced an unpleasant situation as she was questioned about the development works undertaken by her by locals during poll campaign at Sanddibahal village under Gaisilet block in Bargarh district on Tuesday. Several locals questioned Rita about lack of developmental activities in the region. However, she failed to give any kind of satisfactory answers to the public. Later, Rita's supporters intervened and didn't allow the public to question anymore. "Farmers in our area are facing several problems. No development activities have been undertaken in our area. When we asked our MLA about the development works undertaken in our area during her tenure, she could not give any satisfactory replies," alleged a voter. "MLA's supporters wanted to give answers for her, but she didn't reply anything. When we wanted to know the answer from the MLA, her supporters didn't allow us to ask questions," he added.



## Election funding Illegal mining of quartz stones rampant in Birmaharajpur

**SRIKUMAR MAHANTA ■ SONEPUR**  
With elections going on in the State, all political parties are in need of funds. This has paved the way for rise in illegal mining and smuggling of quartz stones in the localities under Birmaharajpur tehsil in Subarnapur district, sources informed here. Money acquired from such nefarious deals is being used by leaders to fund their campaigns, the sources alleged. According to the information available, the stones are being extracted from quarries belonging to the Odisha Government. Then they are being smuggled outside the State at high rates. In the process, the Government is losing out on huge amount of revenues, the sources said. An influential racket is allegedly working behind the loot in connivance with the political leaders and officials of the district administration, the sources added. The absence of a proper office of the Mining Department in the district is another cause behind the rampant increase in illegal mining. The nearest office of the department is in Bolangir, where a Deputy Director sits. If regular raids had been conducted in the various stockyards in Birmaharajpur tehsil, the rampant looting of quartz stones could have been exposed, the locals said. Describing the modus operandi, a person on condition of anonymity said that quartz stones are lifted from the quarries and stored in a number of stockyards. Then they are transported to various industries outside Odisha. The person pointed out that the transportation of quartz stones in trucks wouldn't have been possible without police help. It should be stated here that quartz granules are used to develop slag in blast furnaces in steelmaking units. They also act as a protective cover on steel gutters. Sources said the Mining Department has leased out the quarries in Dadarpali and Bankia villages under Birmaharajpur tehsil.



## 'Under Modi, India now self-sufficient in defence sector'

**LS Speaker Birla joins BJP campaign in Baleswar**  
**UBACHAK MOHANTY ■ BALESWAR**  
Baleswar would go for simultaneous twin polls in the last phase i.e. on June 1 and May 15 was the day of scrutiny of nomination papers of candidates ahead of final list and withdrawal. As expected, the BJP embarked on an aggressive campaign which was joined by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla as star campaigner. Arriving in a chopper and landing at NOCCI (North Orissa Chamber of Commerce and Industries) premises, he addressed a selected mass there on the topic 'Vikashit Bharat Vikashit Odisha.' Birla said within 10 years of the Modi Government, India established herself prominently in the defence sector and became self-sufficient. "Earlier while we were dependent on America, Russia and several European countries, now we groomed ourselves as self-dependent by indigenous development of 80 percent of our weaponry requirements. Even in some cases we are exporting our defence products," he said, adding, "The terrorism and subversive activities prevalent before 2014 have been contained to a large extent. Further, the possibility of growth of new industries through policies has emerged while the economy of the country has witnessed an upward jump in the last decade." The people of Odisha have made their minds for a change and this is the time to remove the incumbent Naveen Government, Birla further added. Prior to Birla, several other speakers including BJP candidate and sitting MP Pratap Sarangi addressed the audience of the NOCCI hall highlighting various growth in different sectors and overseas popularity of the Modi Government. He slammed the State Government on various fronts counting failures. Mamata Mohapatra and Mohit Poddar were among others who coordinated the programme. MLA candidates of Remuna and Sadar, Ajay Agarwal and Gobinda Das respectively besides Manas Dutta also spoke on the occasion. Notably, Baleswar Parliament seat would witness a tough triangular contest among the BJP, BJD and Congress. Two former Union Ministers, Srikanth Jena and Pratap Sarangi of Congress and BJP respectively have filed their nominations, while the BJD has fielded firebrand woman leader Dr Lekhasri Samantsingar after she joined the party defecting from BJP. However, unlike other Parliamentary constituencies, it appears Jena would pose a tough challenge to the other two contestants, Sarangi and Samantsingar.









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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Eating gold

Already costly, food items to be dearer on the back of heatwave, poll expenditures

With wholesale inflation hitting a 13-month high of 1.26 per cent in April and the mercury poised to peak in the next two months, stubbornly rising food prices are worrying many a family across the nation. This rise was driven as both food and fuel became dearer. Interestingly, India's retail inflation, measured by the consumer price index (CPI), fell to an 11-month low of 4.83 per cent year-on-year in April 2024, compared to 4.85 the previous month. The Reserve Bank of India primarily considers retail inflation when formulating monetary policy. However, for the average person, the rise in WPI is concerning as it is primarily influenced by food items, both processed and unprocessed, as well as manufactured goods. India is experiencing an ongoing heatwave, which is expected to affect vegetable prices. WPI inflation is forecast to increase to 2-3 per cent in May 2024; it is expected to spiral up and reach its peak in June 2024. WPI food inflation, which includes primary food articles and manufactured food items,



increased for the third consecutive month to an eight-month high of 5.5 per cent in April (compared to 0.4 per cent in April 2023), driven by both manufactured food products (reaching a 15-month high of 1.2 per cent) and primary food articles (reaching a four-month high of 7.7 per cent).

The increase in WPI inflation in April was attributed mainly to fuel and food items. However, there is a silver lining as the outlook for food inflation has improved due to expectations of a normal monsoon, which is anticipated to boost agricultural production. Additionally, commodity prices have rebounded on hopes of increased demand from China. Since it is an election

year, there is an automatic push to prices based on market speculation and uncertainty over continuation of governance policies, not to mention that the cost of election is recovered from the common man via higher prices. The funding of political parties by corporates and traders often reflects in the spiralling prices, pre- and post-elections. Logistic bottlenecks, labour shortages and increased transportation costs, thanks to oil prices, all contribute to the overall inflationary pressures, amplifying the challenges faced by food producers and consumers alike. Amid the backdrop of escalating food prices, election discussions revolve around economic policies and their impact. High prices and employment concerns loom large as hot topics, reflecting the broader sentiment of economic anxiety among voters. Generally, the ruling party bears the brunt of inflation as people hold it responsible for not keeping the prices in check. Effectively managing inflation entails employing a comprehensive strategy that harmonises short-term interventions with enduring structural changes. Swift actions, like directed subsidies and mechanisms for stabilising prices, can provide temporary respite to consumers contending with rising food expenses. Until that happens, we can happily fulfil our tax obligations by paying through our nose. Indeed, inflation is taxation without legislation!

### PICTALK



BSF personnel with a youth cycle rally to raise awareness for water, education and clean environment, in Dinajpur

## Embracing the joys and wisdom of age

Amidst serene nature, I pondered time's fleeting nature and shifting age perspectives, inspired by three chance encounters

I spent a memorable week in the mountains last year. Crisp and importantly clean mountain air, long walks along jungle trails, beautiful sunrises and sunsets and views of snow-capped peaks in the distance, were only a few of the bonuses that the place offered.

It was during this trip that three different people, in their way, tried to put us at ease, by referring to the facilities that they offered for the comfort of senior citizens. I would have bristled indignantly at a reference to my advancing age until only a couple of years back. Now I was not offended.

I remember an incident about 25 years back. One evening, a younger engineer, recruited through campus placement and working with me, remarked, "Sir, I am amazed by your energy. You work so hard and such long hours even at this age."

At 40, I could not take the Statement as a compliment that he had intended it to be and quipped rather caustically, "What do you mean



by this age? I am still young." I would love to see his face today if someone were to remark to him about his age. I completed 60 five years back. That was the time I realised the benefits that I was entitled to as I booked my air or train ticket at a discount. I could conveniently travel in the metro trains sitting comfortably on the seats meant for seniors, till someone older than me, or at least someone who looked older than me, came and stood near

me. Old habits die hard. I would offer my seat to the more needy or gallantly offer the seat to a much younger woman since that is what I was taught. But chivalry still had limits. I was not prepared to be called an old man or even an uncle by the younger people. Till we faced the onslaught of something terrible four years back - covid. It invaded our lives like nothing we had witnessed in our lifetime. I too had my share of the dread that many might have

undergone during their last living moments. We understood the fragility of life. Many, much younger, did not make it through the nights. I did and realised the privilege of being called old. Many will never get the opportunity. I live and it accords me the benefit of rambling like an old fool to wide-eyed younger people who in some distant future would be fortunate enough to recount their pearls of wisdom. I hope that some of these gems may have been dispensed by me. I am proud of being called old as I remember the words of Frank Lloyd Wright, "The longer I live, the more beautiful life becomes." But let us not forget that getting old also comes with a lot of responsibility towards others. I hope that I can say with hands on my heart when I meet the supreme being, "I lived a life that made a difference to the people around me!"

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

# BJP retains control, INDIA gains ground



SIDHARTH MISHRA

The Opposition's revival from near-disarray presents a formidable challenge but may fall short of the impact needed to dislodge the BJP-led NDA

With phase four of the polling over, we are more than halfway through the ongoing Lok Sabha polls. There is no denying that the opposition INDIA bloc, led by the Congress, has been able to create a perspective that it isn't a one-sided battle and the fight was on all the seats.

The usual gimmicks of stock market predictions and illegal 'satta' gambling forecasts have started to emerge on social media and private WhatsApp groups. However the underlying message is that come what may, the BJP shall be able to form the Government. This probably emerges from the faith the BJP supporters have in the abilities of Prime Minister Narendra Modi being a leader with gargantuan mass appeal. However, there is also no denying the fact that the opposition was in tatters when the poll campaign started but by the passing of time have been able to create an image of a close fight, which in the end could prove to be just a mirage. Nevertheless, the Congress campaign in the 2024 polls, whatever the results, would remain an area of discussion among the political scientists in the times to come.

Congress's poll preparation could be said to have begun from the conclave it had at Udaipur in 2022. The declarations at the 'Udaipur Shivir' talked of building a vibrant organisation. This came in the backdrop of desertions plaguing the party especially from their most prominent leader Rahul Gandhi's coterie. In 2022, when the Congress met in Rajasthan, one right decision it took was to hold the polls for the post of the president of the All India Congress Committee. It did activate the party and in Mallik arjun Kharge, the party has found a good campaigner, who not only campaigns hard but makes a lot of sense with what he says.

Strategically, unlike the Vidhan Sabha polls held some months back in the four States, the leadership has consolidated on the



ANI

alliance despite the initial hiccup caused by its very convener, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar walking out of the formation. Though some point out that Kharge and not Nitish was foisted as the chair of the alliance, as given his track record, Nitish's opposition to the BJP was always suspect. The second move by Congress has been to channel the strength of the alliance partners to keep itself afloat. To this end, the party went into the 2019 polls all by itself. With no major allies and up against the BJP and the SP-BSP alliance, Congress contested 67 of the State's 80 seats. It could win only one: Sonia Gandhi in Rae Bareilly. This time in alliance with the Samajwadi Party it's contesting just 17 seats, down by 50 seats. People close to poll planning, point out that it has been done to conserve the party resources for more realistic contests. Similarly West Bengal, after contesting 40 seats in 2019 is contesting just 14 seats this time giving the remaining seats to the alliance partner - the Left parties. Similar arrange-

ments have been made in other States. Now how would that affect the final results? The BJP in 2024 wants to equal the performance of the Congress in 1984 when it got more than 400 seats. What's not to be forgotten is that those 400 seats came as a harvest of the sympathy wave in the favour of the party following the assassination of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. What makes BJP in 2024 different from Congress in 1984 is that it has delivered on its ideological agenda thus the cadre commitment would be there. Based on that the saffron party has expanded its poll machinery. This could work both ways, if there is an undercurrent, it would bring bonus points and if there is voter indifference, the performance should not fall below, as they say in commerce, the reserve price.

(The writer is the author and president, the Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views expressed are personal)



THE CONGRESS CAMPAIGN IN THE 2024 POLLS, WHATEVER THE RESULTS, WOULD REMAIN AN AREA OF DISCUSSION AMONG POLITICAL SCIENTISTS IN THE TIMES TO COME

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### THE ESSENCE OF RAM RAJYA

Madam — Apropos the news article "Ram Rajya will begin in the country now, doesn't mean theocratic State: Rajnath Singh," published on 14 May, this is my response. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's remarks on the inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya and the concept of Ram Rajya reflect a perspective blending faith with civic duty. Singh emphasises that Ram Rajya isn't about establishing a theocratic State but fostering a sense of responsibility among citizens. His call for a return to the essence of politics, where words align with actions, resonates with the public disillusionment with political rhetoric. Singh's stance on the triple talaq issue underscores a commitment to gender equality transcending religious boundaries. His assertion reflects a broader narrative of social justice and protection of vulnerable individuals, regardless of religious affiliation. As he seeks reelection, Singh's emphasis on fulfilling electoral promises underscores accountability in governance. His track record in Lucknow adds weight to his assertion, aligning action with words. Overall, Singh's discourse encapsulates a nuanced understanding of governance, intertwining religious symbolism with practical governance and societal welfare.

Vihaan Sharma | Kolkata

#### KEJRIWAL'S GUARANTEE

Madam — It refers to the article "Kejriwal's bail: Unveiling political prophanis post-release," published on 13 May. Most of the AAP's guarantees require more funds since most are a burden to the State exchequer. Free electricity, the MSP guarantee, the scrapping of the magnifier and the creation of two crore jobs need heavy payout from the State exchequer. Finding funds without taxing the people is not possible in today's situation. The six guarantees of the Congress remain to be implemented in Karnataka and Telangana. Guarantees have become political stunts during elections. Furthermore, during the last 2019 gener-

#### Triangular contest in Ladakh



Apropos the news article "Ladakh stands alone in Lok Sabha roll call," published on 13 May, this is my response. The political landscape in Ladakh has dramatically shifted, morphing a once two-way battle between the BJP and Congress into a three-way challenge. The emergence of local alliances and the entry of an independent candidate complicates the electoral dynamics, adding layers to an already complex scenario. The contest reflects the region's aspi-

rations and frustrations, particularly regarding Statehood and constitutional status. The BJP's incumbency faces scrutiny, with discontent palpable over unmet demands. Meanwhile, Congress positions itself as a champion of local interests, leveraging historic ties and promising to address grievances.

The involvement of grassroots movements and renowned figures underscores the grassroots activism shaping Ladakh's political narrative. The electorate's choice will influence not just parliamentary representation but also the trajectory of regional autonomy and development. As the campaigns intensify, candidates grapple with reconciling national agendas with local exigencies, emphasising dialogue and resolution of longstanding issues. Ultimately, Ladakh stands at a crossroads, poised to redefine its political identity through this pivotal electoral battle.

Dhruv Malhotra | Mumbai

al election, Kejriwal said that that would be the last election if Modi is returned to power. It was Indira Gandhi who included the words socialism and secularism in the preamble of the Constitution. So the charge Modi will not hold elections or tamper with the constitution is without substance and a repeat of what was said in 2019. Furthermore, many politicians, actors and so-called social workers said in 2014 and 2019 that if Modi wins the elections they will move out of the country. Still, they are all here enjoying the fruits of freedom. On corruption, first, let Kejriwal come clean on the Delhi liquor gate scam.

N R Ramchandran | Chennai

#### PARAG'S INSPIRING JOURNEY

Madam — Apropos the news article "Home Turf: Rajasthan Aim to clinch a playoff berth in Parag's 'Royal' Homecoming," published on 14 May, this is my response. Riyan Parag's journey from the northeastern corner of India to becoming a cricketing sensation embodies hope and perseverance. His anticipated return to Guwahati, backed by a

robust performance, not only fuels the Rajasthan Royals' playoff dreams but also marks a milestone for cricket in the region. Parag's stellar season, coupled with the strategic investment made by the Royals, highlights the potential lying dormant in lesser-explored cricketering territories.

The upcoming matches against Punjab Kings and Kolkata Knight Riders hold more than just playoff implications; they symbolise the rise of a new cricketering stronghold. While Parag's emergence steals the spotlight, it's crucial to acknowledge the collective effort of the team. Sanju Samson's leadership and consistent batting form, alongside the solid bowling unit, underscore the Royals' strength as a cohesive unit. As cricketer enthusiasts, witnessing Parag's ascent not only inspires but also reshapes the narrative of cricketering talent in India, extending its reach beyond conventional boundaries.

Ishita Kapoor | Ahmedabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

### HARNESSING THE POWER OF RESOLUTION

Achievers propel success with determination and humility



RAVI VALLURI

Successful completion of a task releases endorphins in the body which act as a tonic and an analgesic. "Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed is more important than any other," said Abraham Lincoln. Resolution is the positive intent, resolve or aspiration to give a hundred per cent to achieve the targeted goal. Before treading the path, one should remain grateful and blessed for the abundance provided by nature. Half the job gets done by feeling the blessings. Effort, skill and courage are prerequisites for brewing this heady cocktail. Achievers tap the potential from the depths of their minds and hearts and conquer the fear of failure in the process. The mind is that element of a person that enables him to be aware of the world and its myriad experiences to think positively and to feel the faculty of consciousness simultaneously purging negative thoughts in the bargain. One must dream big, even if ideas may appear outlandish to become high-end achievers and ensure to never kill an idea, however whimsical it may appear on the surface. That is the Audacity of Hope. Be it a Mandela, a Modi, or an Obama. "The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires," writes William Arthur Ward. Successful individuals foster friendships and build trust. There is no deficit in trust. They respect colleagues and only symphony is orchestrated in the environment. There is no room for any cacophony. Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar always differentiates between mere hearing and the art of listening. Listening is a trait of a humble person; while hearing is the character of a brusque and an inaccessible person. An achiever is available to all his followers 24\*7, 365 days a year. Achievers are adaptable to new ideas, thought processes, abstractions and intentions. Their minds are not closeted by achievements or failures of the past and continuously live in the present moment. This is the trademark of their personality.



Those who are high achievers are not driven by amassing wealth. Such trailblazers and trendsetters are continuous learners. Leadership implies 3Ls for them. These are learned, learn some more and learn even more. Top-grade sportsmen, artists and scientists are compulsive learners and are humble about their achievements. There is only one path from the top and that is downhill. High-end achievers never believe that they have reached the summit or the pinnacle or that they are too powerful. Such a conjecture smacks of capriciousness and arrogance and that would be their nemesis. Every successful career is a lesson in humility. Rewards and recognition are meant to act as motivators, not create a glass ceiling of conceit. Achievers are surrounded by positive-oriented people and positive thoughts, as negative emotions are a big drain on resources. It is important to ascertain positive feedback and build on the synergy of the group. Understanding group dynamics is an important physical and psychological tool. They glean synergies of any joint venture. Achievers always work with teams and individuals who share their values, they possess long-term vision inherently and believe in themselves and the set goals. They direct the wind and the sails. Such people need to build on their strengths and those of the organisation. It is essential and paramount to prioritise targets, the mission and vision Statements, identify a self-do list and focus on projects that can be delegated. "A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way," says John C Maxwell.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

# Electric tractors for electrifying agriculture

These technological marvels promise not only to rejig farming practices but also to mitigate the industry's environmental footprint



AS MITTAL

Climate change is an issue of utmost importance that the world is currently facing and it is a challenge that is complex and multifaceted. Particularly the agriculture sector is vulnerable, as greenhouse gas emissions are being released into the atmosphere, causing extreme weather conditions such as heat waves and floods. This is directly impacting crop productivity and farmers' livelihoods, which is a significant threat to global food security. To counter this challenge, we must adopt environmentally friendly cultivation and processing methods. Electric tractors are one of the globally emerging excellent alternatives for future farming. It can reduce farming costs and zero emissions effectively addressing the issue of a sustainable environment and reducing our dependence on imports of crude oil.

As the world's largest tractor manufacturer, India sells over 1 million tractors annually. However, the adoption of electric tractors has been slower than other electric vehicles (EVs) like two-wheelers, three-wheelers, passenger cars and electric buses. It's time to take action and promote electric tractors. This will foster an environment for mass adoption and position India as a global exporter of electric tractors. To achieve this, we must integrate electric tractors into incentivised EV policies. It's unacceptable that no incentives are being offered for electrifying tractors.

Electric Tractors Could be Fetched in FAME-3 Scheme: The FAME-2 scheme (April 2019-March 2024) was a central Government subsidy that aims to promote the Fast Adoption and Manufacturing of Hybrid and Electric Vehicles (FAME). The scheme ended on 31st March, with a total outlay of Rs 10,000 crore to support the production of 7,000 electric buses, half a million electric three-wheelers, 55,000 electric passenger cars and one million electric two-wheelers. However, the scheme excludes electric tractors, which means that manufacturers cannot significantly reduce the cost of producing electric tractors.

The Ministry of Heavy Industries has recently proposed the FAME-3 scheme, which has an outlay of Rs 12,600. The scheme is expected to be implemented after the Lok Sabha elections. Farmers are hoping that the scheme will include electric tractors, which will reduce their costs significantly. With a subsidy of up to Rs 2.4 lakh (capped at 40 per cent of the tractor's base price), the burden of high purchasing costs on farmers will be greatly reduced.

To promote the use of electric vehicles, several States such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh offer concessions or a waiver on the road tax between 50 per cent and 100 per cent. Other States, including Delhi, Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, offer direct cash incentives on top of the road tax waiver through a similar approach to the central FAME scheme. The incentives range from Rs 2,500 to Rs 10,000 and the subsidy cap ranges from Rs 60,000 to Rs 2.5 lakh, depending on the battery capacity. Punjab and Haryana offer incentives (up to 40 per cent of the ex-showroom price) for e-tractors in their EV policies. Other key agricultural States should consider following this approach to promote sustainable agricultural practices.

Rationalisation of Taxes: Tax rationalisation has proven to be an effective way of promoting electric vehicles through discounted taxes and insurance fees. The existing fiscal incentives provided for zero-emission



THE ADOPTION OF ELECTRIC TRACTORS PRESENTS A STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FOR INDIA TO ENHANCE ITS ECONOMIC PRODUCTIVITY, PLAY A PIVOTAL ROLE IN ACHIEVING NET-ZERO EMISSIONS, STRENGTHEN THE RURAL ECONOMY AND SHAPE A SUSTAINABLE AND RESILIENT FARM FUTURE

motor vehicles should be extended to zero-emission tractors as well. While electric vehicles are charged a reduced GST of 5 per cent, e-tractors are still taxed at the same rate as diesel tractors, which is 12 per cent. Additionally, electric vehicles receive a 15 per cent discount on third-party insurance premiums, whereas this provision is not available for e-tractors. The International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) has analysed that reducing the GST to 5 per cent or even nil and providing discounted insurance would reduce the cost gap between electric and diesel tractors by almost 40 per cent.

Infrastructure Development: Investing in charging infrastructure for electric tractors, especially in rural areas, is crucial for the rural economy to meet India's development goals by 2047. Using corporate social responsibility (CSR) funds for this purpose and establishing a charging station network with incentives will ensure widespread accessibility and convenience for farmers.

To increase demand for electric tractors, it's important to introduce them into custom hiring centres for agricultural machinery. This will help farmers experience the benefits of electric tractors and mitigate challenges related to charging and maintenance.

R&D Investments & Training: Allocating funds for research and development in electric tractor technology can lead to innovation, efficiency improvement and cost reduction. Encouraging collaboration between Government agencies, agricultural research institutions such as the Indian Council for Agricultural Research and the manufacturers would speed up technological advancements in the sector. Developing and certifying testing and quality assurance standards for electric tractors can attract manufacturers to this sector, addressing supply-side constraints. Institutes

like the Central Farm Machinery Training & Testing Institute can set manufacturing, operational and performance standards for various electric tractors based on power output, design and usage purposes. Training and skill development initiatives for farmers, technicians and service providers on electric tractor operation, maintenance and repair are crucial. Empowering stakeholders with the necessary knowledge and skills will facilitate the transition to electric tractors and ensure their effective use in agricultural operations.

Zero Emissions in Electric Tractor: A study by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, reveals that the agriculture sector in India is responsible for almost 14 per cent of the country's greenhouse gas emissions, with diesel-powered machinery playing a major role. However, electric tractors could be a solution to these challenges.

Currently, most tractors used in India are powered by diesel, which accounts for approximately 7.4 per cent of the country's annual diesel consumption, equivalent to the amount consumed by buses. While incentives have been introduced to encourage the electrification of buses, no such incentives have been introduced for tractors.

The adoption of electric tractors presents some challenges, such as the initial cost, infrastructure development and promoting their use among farmers. Diesel-powered machinery, notably tractors, accounts for approximately 12-15 per cent of the total cost of agricultural production, which varies by crop type and geographical region. However, electric tractors have many advantages, including zero-emission and a reduction in fuel and maintenance costs due to having fewer moving parts.

According to a study by the Indian Agricultural Research Institute (IARI), electric tractors could reduce

maintenance costs by up to 40 per cent over their lifetime, providing a more reliable, environment friendly and cost-effective option for farmers. The Way Forward: India's tractor manufacturers have developed advanced technology and moved beyond incentives to introduce electric tractors. However, the primary challenge at present is the cost. On-road zero-emission electric tractors cost 40 to 50 per cent more than diesel tractors. This high cost could deter farmers, even though electric tractors are more cost-effective when used in the field. Urgent support from the Government is needed in the early stages of the market to bridge the cost gap between e-tractors and diesel-driven tractors.

Central and State-level incentives would send a positive signal to the industry to invest more in zero-emission tractors. Additionally, this aligns with India's goal of improving air quality and energy security and has the potential to boost India's tractor exports. Countries such as the US, Europe, Japan and Canada have implemented strict regulations for tractor emissions and have expressed interest in decarbonising farm machinery.

The global electric tractor market is projected to grow from USD 0.7 billion in 2024 to USD 3.4 billion by 2030, presenting a strategic opportunity for India to leverage its manufacturing capabilities. It can enhance its economic competitiveness, play a pivotal role in achieving net-zero emissions, strengthen the rural economy and shape a sustainable and resilient farm future.

The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika ITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanisation Association (TMA). Views expressed are personal.

# AI is revolutionising sustainable, tech-driven farming

By harnessing data-driven insights, AI empowers farmers to optimise resource allocation, mitigate environmental degradation and enhance crop yields

Artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture is expected to increase dramatically food waste, climate change and other issues lead approximately one billion people to remain hungry and malnourished even though the globe produces enough food to feed everyone. With 9.7 billion people expected to inhabit the planet by 2050, the agriculture sector is under increasing pressure to provide food with less resource use and less environmental effect. Thankfully, the application of artificial intelligence (AI) in agriculture has promise for revolutionising food systems and mitigating the world food issue. AI can assist farmers in making data-driven choices, optimising resource consumption and minimising envi-



PRERNA NEGI

ronmental effects by analysing data from several sources. According to a World Economic Forum analysis, integrating AI into agriculture might result in a 60 per cent reduction in the use of pesticides and a 50 per cent reduction in water usage. Market demand analysis is an essential component of contemporary agriculture. In addition to analysing meteorological data and satellite

photos, AI can assist farmers in choosing the best crop to produce or sell and offer insightful advice on when to plant and what kind of crop to grow. It is possible to forecast market demand for certain crops while optimising profitability by examining data patterns. Farmers may reduce the likelihood of crop failures by using forecasting and predictive analytics. This will create software applications that analyse fruits and vegetables and offer information on their quality, freshness and size using artificial intelligence (AI) and computer vision methods. In addition to identifying flaws and illnesses in crops, these AI technologies allow farmers to take preventative action before the crops are impacted. Artificial

Intelligence (AI) can assist in the production of crops that are more weather and disease-adapted by gathering data on plant growth. Scientists can use AI to find the best-performing plant kinds and cross-breed them to make even more superior hybrids. AI systems are capable of reliably estimating missing nutrients and performing chemical soil analysis.

One of their products, Nutrient Scanner, gathers information from soil samples and gives farmers precise estimations of the nutrients that are lacking and the general condition of the soil. This enables farmers to optimise crop growth and minimise environmental impact by modifying irrigation schedules and fertiliser applications. AI

can monitor the State of plants to spot and predict diseases, identify and remove weeds and recommend effective treatment of pests.

It can also suggest the most effective treatment for pests, reducing the need for broad-spectrum insecticides that can harm beneficial insects and lead to pesticide resistance. Farmers find it difficult and time-consuming to estimate crop growth and maturity, but AI can complete the work accurately and swiftly. Farmers can accurately forecast when crops will achieve ideal maturity by monitoring and tracking crop changes with the use of AI-powered gear, such as sensors and image recognition tools. According to studies, the accuracy rate attained by employing AI to forecast crop

maturity was greater than that of human observers. Farmers may benefit from large cost savings and better revenues as a result of this improved precision. Farmers can precisely track the amount of water and nutrients in the soil by integrating sensors and AI systems.

Deploying devices that detect several factors such as temperature, pH levels, nutrient content and soil moisture might be part of the sensor-based soil monitoring process. These sensors relay data back to AI systems, which process it, evaluate it and advise farmers on the best ways to handle their crops in light of the soil conditions they have discovered. AI-powered technologies can help farmers identify plant illnesses and insects faster

than people can. For instance, an AI-powered system might identify an aphid infestation on a strawberry field, transmit the information back to the farmer's Smartphone and then recommend the best course of action.

Through a linked sprayer, the device could even automate the spraying of pesticides if necessary. AI technology can be used to automate insect or weed control. Robotic weeding is supposed to be extraordinarily accurate with the use of computer vision, saving 90 per cent of pesticide use. These solutions use data analytics to determine how much pesticide is required for each field based on information about crop type, soil condition and field history. In the upcoming years, artificial

intelligence (AI) in agriculture is expected to increase dramatically since it can completely transform the industry by boosting efficiency, decreasing waste and raising crop yields. The market for AI in agriculture is likely to develop rapidly, with a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 35.6 per cent expected to see the market size rise from \$2.35 billion in 2020 to \$10.83 billion by 2025, according to research by Markets and Markets. This will lead to more informed decision-making and improved crop yields, essential for addressing the global food security challenge.

(The writer is research scholar, Department of Agronomy, SGRR University, Dehradun; views are personal)







Gen Zs, millennials globally optimistic about economy, social situation: Survey

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

More than half of Gen Zs and two-thirds of millennials globally are optimistic about the economic and social situation of the country and expect it to improve further, a Deloitte survey said on Wednesday.



Two-thirds of millennials (65 per cent) and more than half of the Gen Zs (58 per cent) expect the country's economic outlook to improve in the next year.

However, they are equally convinced that they will need to reskill and GenAI will influence their career decisions and cause some job loss. The survey also highlights how women are more upbeat about GenAI and slightly more comfortable working with it than men.

Exports up one per cent in April; trade deficit widens to four months high

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's merchandise exports rose by 1 per cent to USD 34.99 billion in April even as the trade deficit widened to a four-month high of USD 19.1 billion during the month, according to government data.



due to a significant jump in gold imports. The imports of precious metals more than doubled to USD 3.11 billion in April this year.

14.44 billion. The previous high in the deficit was recorded in December 2023 at USD 19.8 billion. In March 2024, the outbound shipments dipped to USD 41.68 billion from USD 41.96 billion a year ago.

USD 437.1 billion, while services exports stood at USD 341.1 billion. In merchandise exports, 13 of the 30 key sectors exhibited positive growth in April as compared to same period last year.

Markets snap three days winning run; Sensex slips over 100 points

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Wednesday after three days of rally, dragged down by selling pressure in HDFC Bank and unabated foreign fund outflows.

points or 0.08 per cent to 22,200.55. From the Sensex pack, Tata Motors, Asian Paints, HDFC Bank, JSW Steel, Hindustan Unilever, Nestle and Titan were the major laggards.

Hong Kong were closed for a holiday. European markets were trading mostly higher. Wall Street ended with gains on Tuesday.

MakeMyTrip posts Q4 profit of USD 171.9 million

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Nasdaq-listed MakeMyTrip Ltd on Wednesday reported a multi-fold jump in profit at USD 171.9 million in the March 2024 quarter, aided by gains on tax credit and convertible notes value.

Coal's share in India power generation capacity drops below 50 per cent for first time since 1960s

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The share of coal in India's total power generation capacity dipped below 50 per cent in the first quarter of 2024, the first time since the 1960s.



all construction of new coal-fired power plants. The term 'unabated' generally refers to the continued use of coal, oil, and gas without efforts to curtail emissions.

market has rebounded and gone from strength to strength," Vibhuti Garg, Director - South Asia, IEEFA, said.

Sebi eases KYC compliance guidelines

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has decided to simplify the risk management framework for validating Know Your Customer (KYC) records through KYC Registration Agencies (KRAs), a move that will ensure ease of transacting for investors, experts said on Wednesday.

for investment, verifying digital identities has become increasingly important," he added.



intermediaries. On Tuesday, Sebi simplified the risk management framework for ease of transacting by clients based on the feedback received from the stakeholders in the securities market.

invalidating proofs of address such as ration cards, electric bills, or scanned Aadhaar cards. Presently, the mandate requires KRAs to verify certain attributes of client records within two days of receiving the KYC record.

Tax Department database on PAN, Aadhaar, XML, DigiLocker or M-Aadhaar) will be considered 'validated records'. Individuals with invalid documentation will not be permitted to trade in the securities market.

Government aims to boost use of artificial intelligence in food processing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India plans to accelerate the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the food processing sector to improve efficiency, enhance farmers' incomes and reduce the environmental impact, officials said on Wednesday.



agriculture but the food processing sector was still in the early stages of using such technologies. NITI Aayog member Ramesh Chand said efficient food processing was "climate smart", helping enhance farmer incomes, satisfy consumers and reduce environmental impact amid increasing climate change challenges.

IIFCL profit rises 44 per cent in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India Infrastructure Finance Company Ltd (IIFCL) on Wednesday reported a 44 per cent jump in standalone net profit to Rs 1,552 crore for the fiscal ended March 2024 aided by an increase in lending and moderation in bad loans.

LG looks to enhance leadership in TV segment with products tailored for India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Korean consumer electronics major LG will continue to introduce products in the home entertainment segment tailored for India to maintain its leadership position, according to senior company officials.



our product to the Indian consumer which is a 'picked' product," Jung said.

Aadhar Housing Finance shares make flat market debut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Shares of Aadhar Housing Finance Ltd, which is backed by private equity major Blackstone, made a flat market debut on Wednesday against the issue price of Rs 315. The stock listed at par with the issue price at Rs 315 on the NSE.

BUSINESS BRIEF

BAWEJA IS NEW DIRECTOR (FINANCE), REC LIMITED

Gurugram: Harsh Baweja has taken charge as Director (Finance) at REC Limited after the approval from the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) on May 10.

EPIS ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON HIGHER EDUCATION



Chennai: Educational institutions for engineering have a greater role to play in the process of nation building, said Prof T G Sitharam, Chairman of AICTE.

SAIL LAUNCHES PROGRESSIVE HR INITIATIVES

New Delhi: To strengthen the culture of sustained learning and development in the organisation, Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL) on May 14 launched a number of key progressive Human Resource (HR) initiatives.

SAARC SECRETARY GENERAL VISITS SAU

New Delhi: Md Golam Sarwar, Secretary General of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), visited the South Asian University on May 14. He was warmly received by SAU officials, and students from across South Asian Countries.



